

## Changes required to the practices and procedures of the House

### Introduction

- 3.1 The previous chapter described models and proposal for electronic petitioning in the House of Representatives and identified options for implementation. The degree of change to practice and procedure in the House, as a result of allowing electronic petitions, depends on choices made between these options.

### Overall scope of change

- 3.2 Two existing approaches could serve as models for the scope of change undertaken if the House of Representatives were to adopt electronic petitioning.
- 3.3 The first approach, adopted by the Queensland Parliament represents a modest level of change, in which a website-based system is implemented under the administration of Parliament, but many other aspects of the management of petitions are consistent with earlier arrangements.
- 3.4 In this model, both electronic and hard-copy petitions require the 'sponsorship' of a Member in order that the petition be presented to Parliament, albeit with the difference that for electronic petitions this must be arranged before the petition is posted to accept signatures. Similarly,

electronic petitions are printed so that they may be integrated into the record of the business of Parliament.

- 3.5 The second approach is represented by arrangements in the Scottish Parliament. This would represent a higher level of change if it were implemented in the House. In the Scottish Parliament electronic petitions form part of a deliberate attempt to expand the scope and accessibility of petitions, in general. For electronic petitions, this includes the provision of discussion forums, and extensive use of email facilities to maintain contact with petitioners and provide updates on the progress of petitions.
- 3.6 This drive to expand the engagement function of petitions goes beyond the realm of electronic petitions as such. As noted above, the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) also:
- engages in a high degree of follow-up on petitions after referral to government;
  - refers petitions to other parliamentary committees for inquiry;
  - inquires into petitions where other committees are not available to launch an inquiry; and
  - initiates conferences and roundtables, under the auspices of Parliament, which focus on matters raised in petitions.
- 3.7 This comprises a more active model of the role of petitions in Parliament. There are several distinctive features. First, the PPC has the 'power to legislate', as do other committees in the Scottish Parliament, for which there is no counterpart in the House of Representatives.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.8 Another distinctive feature is that Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) do not present petitions to Parliament: that is the sole province of the PPC. This forms a contrast with the Queensland Parliament, where a petition must attract the support of a Member before the petition can be lodged with Parliament and presented. It also differs from current arrangements in the House of Representatives, where all petitions are considered by the Petitions Committee, but may be presented either by the Chair of the Committee, or by other Members if they so nominate. These two models, Queensland and Scotland, would clearly have very different outcomes if they were applied in the House of Representatives.
- 3.9 If the House were to pattern its electronic petitioning arrangements on the Queensland Parliament, most elements of its current arrangements for petitions could stay the same. There would be a new website for electronic
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1 Mr F McAveety, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.8.

petitions, but petitions could still be printed and integrated into the record of the business of the House, with only minor changes to Standing Orders.<sup>2</sup>

- 3.10 In the Queensland Parliament the requirement that Members be involved in lodging petitions, for electronic petitions, entails that Members provide the Clerk with 'the details of the petition in the correct form; the posted period and a signed acknowledgment that they are prepared to sponsor the E-Petition'.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.11 In the Committee's view, requiring Members to support petitions is one way to protect the integrity of petitions, since it associates petitions with Members, who then must exercise some level of care in relation to a petition in order to preserve their reputation. However, this requirement need not be carried over to the House of Representatives, as it is not essential to the model because there are other ways to guarantee the integrity of petitions. In this case the Petitions Committee should itself serve as the scrutineer and guarantor of the formal integrity of electronic petitions, as it does currently for petitions in hard-copy.
- 3.12 This would also be consistent with the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure, which recommended against imposing a requirement that petitions require the support of Members, arguing that this was
- key to enhancing the effectiveness of petitions as a direct means of communication between the public and the House and focussing Members' involvement on the representation of petitioners' grievances in the House.<sup>4</sup>
- 3.13 If the House of Representatives were, on the other hand, to follow the lead of the Scottish Parliament, this would entail more change, and a more active role for the Petitions Committee in promoting public engagement (particularly for youth); referring petitions to other committees; conducting more extensive inquiries into particular petitions; and increasing the degree of follow-up on concerns raised in petitions.
- 3.14 These measures would also entail the Committee exercising a greater degree of discretion over which petitions should receive attention in the petitions process overall. Currently the Petitions Committee exercises

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2 Clerk of the House of Representatives, Submission no.13, p.8.

3 Legislative Assembly of Queensland, *Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly*, Standing Order no.119(6).

4 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Making a difference: petitioning the House of Representatives*, 2007, p.39.

judgement on petitions in a formal sense, subject to Standing Orders, which is a distinctly different role.

- 3.15 If the Scottish model were adopted across the board, this would entail the use of a wider set of electronic tools to promote discussion and communication.

### Committee comment

- 3.16 In the Committee's view, there is no reason why the House should adopt any parliament's model in its entirety. Rather, the House must adopt those elements of other models as befit its circumstances and which, together, provide a consistent, reliable framework for the management of electronic petitions.
- 3.17 A key question, in the Committee's view, is whether the House needs to adopt a version of the 'more expansive' model adopted in Scotland in order to maintain levels of engagement, or whether the more moderate level of change represented by the application of the Queensland model would provide a sufficient measure to bridge the gap between Parliament and the people.
- 3.18 A subsidiary question hinges on whether the adoption of a greater range of electronic facilities – such as discussion forums – somehow presupposes the more prominent and 'engaged' role currently played by the PPC in the Scottish Parliament. It could be that these facilities would have considerably less value in engaging the community without a committee operating along these lines. Other potential aspects of additional website facilities, such as risk to security and reputation, and cost, are considered below and in Chapters 5 and 6.
- 3.19 Central to the implications of these models for the practices and procedures of the House is the intended role of the Committee: the scope of action it envisages for itself, and the weight and scope accorded it by the House. The provision of discussion forums – or not – may not have a direct bearing on the business of the House. But the prominence and powers of the Committee would affect the House, if they were developed in line with those of the PPC, so that the Committee chose which petitions would receive greater scrutiny.
- 3.20 The capacity to discriminate between petitions alone would represent a considerable change in the Committee's role. Currently, the Committee receives and considers petitions and conveys them to the House. Importantly, it also asks Ministers to respond. A greater deliberative function would see it change it from being a conduit to the House into an

entity capable of promoting particular concerns as it sees fit. Such a role would also bring risks – of a perceived loss of impartiality and consequent politicisation – which will be considered in the final chapter.

## Website scope and interactivity

- 3.21 It is uncertain how House practices and procedures may be affected by levels of interactivity on an electronic petitions website administered by the House. If it is assumed that discussion forums are simply a facility offered to petitioners, to discuss and develop their ideas, rather than as an input to the House, then there may be few direct consequences for practice and procedure.
- 3.22 There are, however, other kinds of consequences that could be anticipated: for example, that of loss of reputation if offensive content were posted on a social-networking component of a site administered by the House.
- 3.23 Witnesses to the inquiry also noted that even a bare-bones electronic petitioning website administered by the House would represent a considerable departure from the House's present (administrative) practice. The House of Representatives website, and that of Parliament in general, currently exhibits a low level of interactivity compared with other websites.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.24 There are currently no facilities on the Parliament's website for users to create content or enter information. A website which allowed users to initiate electronic petitions, or sign them, would represent a significant change in direction. A global review of the parliamentary website is currently considering interactivity among other aspects of website design.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.25 There are two other dimensions that may be affected by offering this functionality on a House electronic petitions website: security and cost. These are considered in Chapters 5 and 6.

## The role of Members

- 3.26 As noted in Chapter 2, amongst the models considered there are significant variations in Members' involvement.

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5 *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 August 2009, p.5.

6 *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 August 2009, p.5.

3.27 The Queensland Parliament requires all petitions to be 'sponsored' by a Member. For electronic petitions sponsoring entails the Member agreeing to be associated with the petition before it is made available for signing on the petitions website and, once the petition is closed, to present it to Parliament. For paper petitions, Members' sponsorship entails an undertaking to present the petition to Parliament. Similar requirements apply in the Senate.<sup>7</sup>

3.28 The positive role of Members in the petitions process has been put by the House of Commons Procedure Committee:

Our view is that the involvement of the constituency Member of Parliament is central to the historic petitions procedure in the House of Commons. The vast majority of Members see the presentation of petitions on behalf of their constituents as one of their responsibilities whether or not they support the petition itself. This involvement strengthens both the petitions procedure itself and the broader relationship between constituents and their Member of Parliament. We believe that it can and should be preserved in any e-petitions system.<sup>8</sup>

3.29 On the other hand, in the Scottish Parliament, as noted, Member involvement has been minimised to the extent that Members do not present petitions: the PPC is the sole conduit for petitions to Parliament.<sup>9</sup> An additional factor in the PPC's action in this regard is that it gives consideration to whether there are other avenues through which the petition may be advanced. In the PPC's view, this has preserved the central role of the public in the petitions process, protecting it from other political interests which might otherwise put it to use.<sup>10</sup>

3.30 In this, the House of Representatives currently occupies a middle-ground. All petitions are considered by the Petitions Committee. Petitions may be lodged by Members and, if found to comply with Standing Orders, may be presented by Members who wish to do so. This represents a loosening of former links between Members and petitions: in former times the support of a Member was needed before a petition could be presented.

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7 *Brief Guides to Senate Procedure - No. 21: Petitions*, viewed 12 October 2009, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/pubs/guides/briefno21.htm>>.

8 House of Commons Procedure Committee 2008, *E-Petitions, First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2007-08*, HC 136, House of Commons, viewed 15/07/09 <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmproced/136/136.pdf>>, p.26, §75.

9 PPC, Submission no.2, p.3.

10 Mr F Cochrane and Mr F McAveety, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.5.

However, the practice by some Members of initiating and presenting multiple instances of a petition led the House to change these arrangements.<sup>11</sup>

## Committee comment

- 3.31 While it may appear, on the face of it, that these questions are not directly linked to the question of whether the House should accept electronic petitions, there is a connection. Electronic petitions, through ease of use and their ability to be signed regardless of geographical constraints, have the potential to be larger and rapidly compiled than hard-copy petitions. This may help them become a more prominent expression of political sentiment, and this in turn raises questions of how best to ensure that integrity is maintained in the petitions process.
- 3.32 There are valid arguments for and against Members being involved in the petitions process. On the one hand, many (although not all) petitions raise concerns that pertain to specific local areas covered by electorates. It would seem natural to seek the local Member's interest in conveying those concerns to Parliament, as would the Member's interest in associating him or her-self with matters raised in their electorate. Members' electorate offices can also provide a measure of administrative support, and this can be useful in compiling petitions.
- 3.33 On the other hand, it may be argued that the process of public petitions can be subverted where political interests – other than those of the public – hold sway. There may be perceptions, in such a scenario, that petitions are not really 'for' the public, and this could have a significant negative effect on public confidence in the petitions process. Ultimately, this could lead to a reduction, rather than an improvement, in effective levels of engagement between Parliament and the public.
- 3.34 This appears to be the correlative of the PPC's suggestion that the exclusion of other players, already possessed of political avenues for their concerns, had supported the public's central role in the petitions process.
- 3.35 In the House of Representatives there would appear to be two main options. Given the history of petitions in the House, a return to greater involvement by Members in petitions would seem unlikely. More likely would be either a continuance of current practice, where all petitions are considered by the Petitions Committee and then either presented by the

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11 *Making a difference*, p.24, paragraph 2.63. The requirement for Members to lodge petitions was changed by deleting Standing Order 207. Standing Order 205(g) prohibited Members from initiating or visibly supporting a petition.

Chair or a Member; or in a model closer to the Scottish system, Members would be more removed from petitions.

- 3.36 This second option would send a stronger signal that petitions are a direct conduit from the public to the House, although presumably Members could still promote petitions, locally or nationally, even if they were not involved in presenting them. However the anticipated benefits of this approach needs to be balanced against arguments that petitions are part and parcel of the traditional relationship between Members and their constituents. In the Committee's view, it may be that current settings represent an effective compromise between these two imperatives.
- 3.37 In practical terms, this would mean that the Petitions Committee would continue to be the lodging entity, for hard-copy and electronic petitions. In this sense the Committee would serve as the effective guarantor for petitions: a role performed by Members and Senators in some of the other parliamentary settings considered in this report.
- 3.38 This raises the question whether the Committee would consider petitions before they were posted on a House petitions website. Indications from Queensland Parliament are that there is value in doing this as it reduces out-of-order petitions.
- 3.39 The most effective way to achieve this effect would be for the Committee's secretariat to view electronic petitions and provide advice to their principal petitioners in keeping with Standing Orders, under the Committee's direction. This would support positive relationships between the House of Representatives and its petitioning constituency.

## **The role of third parties**

- 3.40 Chapter 2 of this report considered, in part, the role of so-called 'third-party' organisations in electronic petitioning to the House of Representatives. Elements of GetUP's proposal – notably an accreditation process for third party electronic petitions websites – would be a significant departure from precedent in the House: hence its consideration in the present chapter.
- 3.41 GetUP, the key third party organisation which appeared before the Committee in this regard, currently maintains its own electronic petitioning website.<sup>12</sup> It argued that the electronic petitions it now hosts

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12 *GetUP! - Action for Australia*, viewed 28 September 2009, <<http://www.getup.org.au/>>.



should be accepted by the House of Representatives if the House allows electronic petitions. Questions about the integrity of such petitions would be addressed by a process of accreditation, imposed by the House, on third parties operating petitions websites.

- 3.42 GetUP's argument was that a significant proportion of people would be reluctant to offer their personal details if a petition were posted on a site administered by the House. GetUP argued that such people would be less likely to sign a petition in the belief that their details could be shared with government agencies without their consent.
- 3.43 In discussion, the Committee voiced a number of concerns about the role of third parties in a future electronic petitioning process, including:
- that the tradition of petitions has been one of individuals expressing their concerns directly to Parliament, and that involvement of third parties as intermediaries would make the relationship less direct;<sup>13</sup> and
  - that the House of Representatives would be less able to verify signatures on petitions where they had been created under the auspices of third parties, and less able to ensure that other aspects of the integrity of petitions were properly managed.<sup>14</sup>
- 3.44 In response, GetUP argued that people who were reluctant to share personal details with the House (which they perceived as allied to government) would be more comfortable signing a petition on a website administered by an organisation, such as GetUP, that maintained an arm's length relationship to Parliament, and to government.<sup>15</sup>
- 3.45 Hence, it was suggested, allowing a role for third-party organisations in electronic petitioning to the House would increase engagement: that is, increase the number of people willing to sign electronic petitions destined for the House of Representatives. In this way, the involvement of third parties would enhance rather than compromise the direct relationship of petitioners to the House.
- 3.46 In relation to the checking and verification of signatures and associated matters, GetUP argued:
- that in the management of its current electronic petitioning it maintained the highest possible levels of integrity and verification;<sup>16</sup>

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13 *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, pp. 5, 6.

14 *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.5; *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.10.

15 GetUP, Submission no.7, p.5.

16 GetUP, Submission no.7, p.5.

- that these levels were in excess of the facilities for verification currently employed for hard-copy petitions, including in the House;<sup>17</sup> and
- that third parties could be accredited by the House of Representatives, in which case conforming to the House's requirements should answer questions on standards and integrity of practice.<sup>18</sup>

## Committee comment

- 3.47 There are a number of things to be said in response to such propositions.
- 3.48 First, regarding the alleged reluctance of petitioners to sign, the Committee considers that this may be countered by informing people of the separation between Parliament and Government, and ensuring that appropriate privacy and security provisions are clearly in place.
- 3.49 Second, electronic facilities for verification may be employed on an electronic petitions website administered by the House as well as they might be on that of a third party organisation.
- 3.50 Third, third party organisations do not need to be the possessor of a website from which electronic petitions may be forwarded to Parliament, in order to contribute to engagement: there are other ways in which third parties involve themselves in campaigns associated with petitions other than collecting electronic signatures.
- 3.51 Fourth and as noted above, accreditation of third party organisations as hosts for electronic petitions would be without precedent in the arrangements of the House, and may be seen to impinge upon its institutional independence.
- 3.52 It is conceivable such arrangements could be created. But questions remain over the practicalities of this, particularly as to how accredited entities would be scrutinised, and who would be empowered to do so. In view of the ability of third party organisations to conduct campaigns on concerns raised in petitions, regardless of whether they have carriage of electronic petition to the House, it is doubtful that there is much value in this approach.
- 3.53 Fifth, there is a philosophical argument that when the signatory applies personal details to a petition it is part and parcel of the expression of political sentiment that occurs in a petition. In this view, an anonymous
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17 Mr E Coper, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.3.

18 Mr E Coper, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.11.

petitioner is an anomaly in terms of the traditional precedents of petitioning.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, providing less information makes verification of signatures more difficult, raising questions over the validity of the process as a whole.

- 3.54 The Committee welcomes the involvement of third party organisations in generating awareness, promoting causes and disseminating information. These are part of the life-blood of our political system. But special accreditation for third party organisations with respect to the petitions process is not necessary and may be counter-productive – in that it could, under the cover of accreditation, provide special avenues to Parliament of particular political agendas.
- 3.55 In light of these constraints, the Committee considers that electronic petitions would be joined (signed) on a website administered by the House. Due to difficulties with verification, the Committee takes the view that electronic petitions ‘created elsewhere’ should not be forwarded to the House in electronic form or in hard-copy. However Members should still be able to present them as documents rather than petitions.

## **Signatories in- and out-side Australia**

- 3.56 As noted above, the willingness to provide personal details could be considered a kind of ‘qualification’ for participation in the petitions process. The Committee considered another element of qualification when it investigated whether residency in Australia should be a condition for signing electronic petitions to the House.
- 3.57 It was noted by the Committee that a feature of the Scottish Parliament’s practice on petitions is that signatures from outside of Scotland are accepted as being of equal status in a petition as those from within.<sup>20</sup>
- 3.58 The PPC advised that once posted ‘the petition can attract e-signatures not just from the local area but also regionally, nationally and internationally’: ‘Scottish system does not require citizenship or residence as a requirement for eligibility to sign an on-line petition’.<sup>21</sup>
- 3.59 This was regarded as an advantage:

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19 *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.5.

20 *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.11.

21 PPC, Submission no.2, p.3.

I think that one of the perceived benefits of allowing an electronic petitioning system was that it opened up the petition, particularly through the discussion forum, to a much wider audience than the person's geographical area. With a petition that somebody brings forward with hard-copy signatures, chances are that most of these hard-copy signatures will be from that local area. But of course the great advantage of e-petitions is that you open up to an entire worldwide audience. It is just something that we have never put any restriction on at all.<sup>22</sup>

3.60 GetUP also told the Committee that its current practice was to accept signatures from outside Australia. It told the Committee that it did not:

use geography to limit people from signing our petitions or from taking our actions for the main reason that a lot of Australians living abroad are still politically active through GetUp! and we do not want to exclude their concerns. We know, through our electoral enrolment efforts before the last election, that there is a very large and engaged expat community who want to be included in the political processes over here although they are residing abroad. That is why GetUp! does not restrict action to Australians currently living in Australia.<sup>23</sup>

3.61 However, GetUP acknowledged that in the context of a national parliament 'obviously the petitions have a greater weight and legitimacy when they come from the constituents who are directly affected by the decisions that are at hand'.<sup>24</sup>

3.62 Likewise, the PPC told the Committee that it appreciated that there were significant differences between the Scottish and Australian Federal parliaments, and that 'if you are in a national parliament you would be thinking that it should be primarily for those individuals within the country'.<sup>25</sup>

3.63 When asked about this in terms of House of Representatives practice, the Clerk of the House replied that this was 'a legitimate practice that we ... do encompass now': that the House currently receives petitions 'from residents of Australia, as opposed to citizens of Australia'. However, the Clerk considered that:

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22 Mr F Cochrane, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.2.

23 Mr E Coper, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.10.

24 Mr E Coper, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.10.

25 Mr F McAveety, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.2.

Foreign citizens from abroad pose a difficult question. I think we have had one instance, back in 1970, 1971 or something like that, where some United States citizens might have had a petition received by leave. But generally we say that Australian citizens abroad but not non-Australian citizens can petition the parliament.<sup>26</sup>

3.64 The Clerk noted a limit on this practice, in that the Parliament must :

have the power to act on whatever the petitioning is about. If noncitizens are petitioning the committee or the parliament on the basis of something that the parliament cannot act on, for example internal affairs in that country, it becomes difficult. But basically I would say that, provided people appropriately describe themselves, it should be okay.<sup>27</sup>

3.65 GetUP noted that it required a postcode on electronic petitions signatures. This allowed aggregate signatures to be split into geographical areas of origin. This, it was suggested, could be the basis of a resolution to the dilemma: that signatures could be distinguished on the basis of geographical origin and counted accordingly.<sup>28</sup>

## Committee comment

3.66 In the Committee's view, this issue is of particular note for electronic petitions. For hard-copy petitions it is much less likely that petitions will be disseminated across countries other than Australia, but these boundaries are not significant barriers to electronic petitions.

3.67 It seems that the solution to this dilemma hinges on the information that is added to the signature on a petition. The Clerk of the House spoke of issues of petitioners 'appropriately describing themselves' in terms of citizenship, and residency. Similarly, GetUP invoked post-codes as a way to discern different locations from which signatures had been added to petitions.

3.68 In the Committee's view a solution may be to require signatories to provide their address. Signatures applied to an electronic petition in- and out-side Australia could be announced separately at presentation without further comment.

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26 Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.7.

27 Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 November 2008, p.7.

28 Mr Coper, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 November 2008, p.10.

- 3.69 The Clerk's synopsis of practice to date provides a basis for this. There is also a further argument in favour of signatories being required to provide an address or, at minimum, a postcode. Currently the House requires only name and signature on petitions. It appears that the advent of electronic petitions could warrant a requirement for a higher level of information.
- 3.70 This would support more accurate validation for signatures to petitions. While there is visual inspection for current hard-copy petitions to the House, the potential for large electronic petitions to be compiled in a short space of time suggests that increasing the requirements for information would be a prudent measure in ensuring the integrity of future petitions. This too would require changes to Standing Orders as they relate to petitions.

## **Presentation in hard or soft copy**

- 3.71 In the previous chapter it was noted that the record of business in the House, including petitions and other tabled documents, consists entirely of hard-copy documents. It was also noted that Queensland Parliament prints out electronic petitions so that they can be integrated into the record of the business of the chamber once presented.
- 3.72 As noted by the Clerk, if the House of Representatives were to accept electronic petitions, it would have the option of accepting them into the record of business in either electronic or hard-copy format.<sup>29</sup>

## **Committee comment**

- 3.73 There are a number of matters to be addressed in considering this question. If electronic petitions were to be presented in electronic form, it would be necessary to match the reliability and transparency of the current method of managing paper petitions. To achieve this, it would be necessary to institute high standards for access, archiving and backup.
- 3.74 There would also need to be a choice of file format that would reduce the risk of obsolescence. Papers from the beginning of federation can easily be read so long as the document has been archived in appropriate conditions, but in the thirty years or so since the advent of the personal computer, file

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<sup>29</sup> Clerk of the House of Representatives, Submission no.13, p.7.

formats have changed regularly, placing doubts over the readability of some documents.

- 3.75 From a procedural point of view, considering the current precedents, accepting petitions in electronic format would be a departure from standing practice. It would divide the current record, now in a single format, into two streams: electronic and hard-copy, and this may result in a less transparent record of the business of the House.
- 3.76 On the other hand there are anomalies thrown up by the House's reliance on paper. Incoming documents are routinely received electronically, printed and then scanned to create a hard-copy 'original', rather than electronically 'received'. This leads to some loss of print image quality, and thus legibility. It may be that printing electronic petitions is, in the final analysis, anomalous, and represents no further gain other than that it conforms with tradition.
- 3.77 It is likely that 'documents' of a variety of types – such as digital moving picture footage or audio files – will, in time, be submitted to the House, for which printing-to-paper will not be an adequate final form. In view of this, electronic petitions may, if the House so chose, be in the forefront of an emerging capacity for the House to accept electronic documents in their original form.
- 3.78 Essential questions hinge on the durability, accessibility and transparency of arrangements around electronic documents, in general, and electronic petitions in particular. If these requirements can be satisfied, then there would seem to be strong arguments in favour of change.
- 3.79 The House would need to consider timing of such a change. In the meantime, printing of electronic petitions would be an acceptable transitional arrangement.